

# **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** April 19, 2018

**Agenda Item:** FWP Statewide Forest Management Plan

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 Minutes

◆-----◆

## **Background**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) prepared a Forest Management Plan (Plan) for forested land administered by its Fisheries, Wildlife, and Parks Divisions. Nearly 200,000 acres of forested lands are distributed among 157 different sites including Fishing Access Sites (FAS), Fisheries Conservation Areas (FCA), Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (WHPA), and State Parks (SP). This is a programmatic plan designed to provide consistent management direction and guidance for developing property-specific forest management plans, implementing forest management projects, and identifying forest management priorities. The Plan applies to all forested land under fee-title ownership administered by FWP. In § 87-1-622(1), Montana Code Annotated (MCA), the legislature directed the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) and State Parks Board (Board) to adopt forest management plans for lands under their jurisdiction. The Board approved the Plan at its February 2018 meeting. The Plan was developed through a collaborative process led by FWP forester, Jason Parke who worked closely with a team of wildlife biologists and a WMA maintenance supervisor in coordination with the FAS program coordinator and the SP chief of operations. The Plan emphasizes wildlife habitat functions, forest health, fire safety, and human safety for high-use areas. The Plan has undergone review by midlevel managers and field staff across all three divisions and by the Legal Unit.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Public comment on the FWP Draft Forest Management Plan was accepted from August 17, through September 18, 2017. The Plan was available on the FWP website, a press release was issued, and a letter was sent to interested parties. FWP received a total of five comments including three from individuals, one from a sportsmen's group and one from another state agency. Two comments directly supported the Plan and the remaining comments offered suggestions. FWP made minor changes to the draft plan in response to internal and external comments.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

The only alternative is to not adopt the Plan. In the absence of a Plan, FWP would continue to conduct forestry work but property-specific planning and projects would not benefit from a consistent approach to prioritization, analysis of habitat values, and establishing desired future conditions and associated prescriptions that take into account a diversity of concerns at multiple scales of analysis.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends adopting the Plan. Forest lands under FWP ownership would benefit from a consistent approach to planning, identifying priorities, and managing individual forested properties. The filter approach described in the Plan would help assure forest management decisions are well informed and objective-based.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the Forest Management Plan as presented.